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NUCLEAR-REPORT
BY Carol Giacomo
WASHINGTON

U.S. intelligence agencies said today the Soviet Union has been steadily rebuilding strategic weapons so that by the mid-1990s it will have deployed better systems that could double its existing arsenal of nuclear warheads.

Among the major changes they cited were an improved Soviet capability against U.S. land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), such as the MX nuclear missile, and "major strides" by Moscow in deploying two new mobile ICBMs that are expected to be less vulnerable to U.S. attack.

In a written report to Congress and in testimony before two Senate subcommittees, two senior intelligence officials provided an unclassified analysis of a vigorous Soviet effort that they said was "the result of an unswerving commitment for the past two decades to build up and improve their strategic force capabilities."

Lawrence Gershwin, the national intelligence officer for strategic programs, said this Soviet trend has been obvious for several years and that neither the report nor the briefing "presented a startling new picture."

But, he acknowledged: "We are witnessing what amounts to a replacement of the entire (Soviet) force ... We can see the implications somewhat better."

Most of the data was provided to congressional committees in classified briefings since February and was made public today at the request of conservative senators who insisted people know about the "Soviet nuclear threat."

Several Democrats noted how unusual it was for career intelligence officials to appear at a public hearing and criticized the Reagan administration for involving them publicly in a political debate.

Congress has still not settled the controversy over the 1986 defense budget. The New York Times reported that the White House approved today's hearing, hoping it would muster support for President Reagan's beleaguered military budget.

In their report, Gershwin and Robert Gates, a CIA deputy director, said by the mid-1990s "nearly all of the Soviets' currently deployed intercontinental nuclear attack forces -- land and sea-based ballistic missiles and heavy bombers -- will be replaced by new and improved systems."

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